(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.)

THE
OPENING OF THE HEART

by

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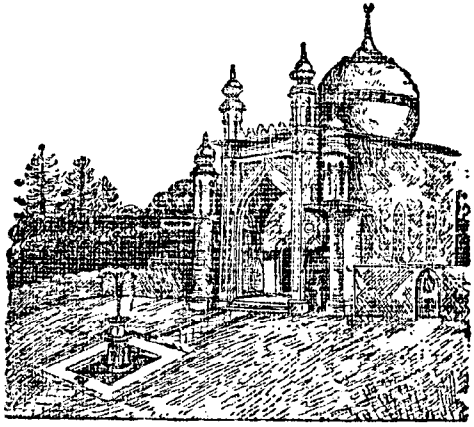

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THE OPENING OF THE HEART

Have we not expanded for you your breast and taken off from you your burden, which pressed heavily upon your back and exalted your mention for you?

So surely with difficulty is ease; with difficulty surely is ease: so when you are free, strive hard, and make your Lord your exclusive object.—(The Holy Qur-an, Chapter XCIV.)

In this world of trial that man alone can live a life of comfort upon whom God has bestowed largeness of heart. Whatever happiness may surround us, however free we may be from the anxieties attendant upon the earning of a livelihood, whatever the wealth which may be ours, we

cannot be saved from the cares which life brings in its train. The enmity of others, their jealousy and malice, family calamities, and the complications of social life are among the burdens—some of them in themselves comparatively trivial—which so often prove to be for us the last straw. The short chapter quoted above was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad at a time of dejection, when things were at their darkest. Although God had already endowed him with that largeness of heart with the help of which he fought down subsequent difficulties in a cheerful spirit and was consequently able to remove the most threatening obstacles from his path : yet these words were primarily addressed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad as they speak of a favour of God to him,—a favour which is not only of vital importance to man, but the desire for which is of spontaneous growth in every heart. The Prophet was not simply informed, by way of prophecy, that he will be blessed with those favours, but he was also told of the way by which he,

and every man, for the matter of that, can attain those favours of God. Who is he who does not want his back relieved of the burden and struggles of this world? Or, who is there who does not wish that his name may be exalted in the world, and awake happy memories in the minds of men? However limited his circle of acquaintances, a man's natural desire is that those who know him should mention his name with respect, if not with acclamation. But these two wishes of man—the lightening of his load and love for fame—can materialize only when he is able to exhibit the quality of large-heartedness. To illustrate my point, let me cite a few events from the life of the Holy Prophet from which will appear not only his extraordinary largeness of heart, but also the fact that but for the same quality the events that were in store for him, to say nothing of their back-breaking power, were sufficient to have crushed him out of existence. His enemies were for ever at his heels, indeed their persecution of him has scarcely a parallel

in history, and finally they conspired to take his life. But it was for these very enemies that he prayed for forgiveness and blessings; and, what is more, when the most stubborn of them came to him and humbled themselves, prepared to receive their well-merited punishment, he forgave them absolutely. These facts point to a heart entirely free from malice, anger and insincerity. People seldom realize what it means for a heart to remain free of these pollutions. Such a condition of mind in a man is certainly a matter for pride, because it alone can create real happiness in him. Malice and anger, in fact, are the instruments which carry a man right down to hell. The enemy will perish only when his time has come, but till then a man may with advantage examine his own heart, and see to what an awful restlessness he is brought by the hatred he feels for his adversary.

The acts of the Holy Prophet which I have mentioned—that is, his praying for his enemies and forgiveness

of them—show clearly enough that his heart was altogether free from all such tormenting feelings towards his enemies, for in it there always lay a superb happiness born of peace. If the heart be not so serene as that, how can a prayer for blessing for an enemy rise from a man's lips, especially when the same enemy is daily making new preparations to injure him? A position like this shows at least that the Holy Prophet's largeness of heart did not allow him to be confused even under these most trying circumstances.

Let us recall the situation which the Holy Prophet Muhammad had to face at Taif. He had been stoned by his enemies, and wounded severely, and owing to excessive loss of blood he was parched with thirst. He tried to crawl to a well; but his enemies would not let him have even a gulp of water. Just at that critical moment of exasperation prayer came to his lips, which breathes only of an anxiety for the welfare of his enemies. He said: "My Lord, guide my people unto the right path, surely they know not." He had, thus, the heart to desire that the race should

continue and should receive guidance from God. It is scarcely necessary to write more on this point; this prayer by itself is sufficient to indicate the kind of heart the Holy Prophet possessed. The loftiness of ambition and generosity of soul which manifest themselves in the prayer of the Holy Prophet, indicate a largeness of heart which seldom falls to the lot of other men, and which again was responsible for his wonderful success and marvellous peace of mind, and which gave him courage to withstand perilous adventures of his career. His life was full of tribulations, all of which he faced in a spirit of the utmost coolness. There is little profit to be gained by indulging in verbal quibbles on various conceptions of virtue. The all-important fact is that there is no human being who is unmolested by enemies or immune from calamities. Jealousy is in itself an evil feeling, but its concomitants—anger, restlessness and the like—are but too apt to invade the human heart with it and create a raging fire, to which none but the man himself becomes a victim. To use an Indian adage—"the water

bubbling out of the kettle is consumed by its heated sides." If at such times the Divine mercy makes a man's heart so to expand that it retains its natural tranquillity all through, then that is a blessing incalculable! The Holy Prophet's example inspired his companions to perseverance in difficulties and calamities, the like of which is not met elsewhere.

The incident in the Holy Prophet's life that took place in the cave of Saur, in the course of his flight to Medina, shows how sure he was of his success, and what unflinching faith he had in God. And he could not have exhibited these qualities of mind, if he had not possessed that largeness of heart of which I have been speaking. The incident happened thus. The Holy Prophet set out to fly from Makka with his sole companion, Abu Bakr the Faithful. There hung over them the danger of being overtaken by the enemies—enemies who were bent on killing them, and were capable of inflicting every imaginable kind of torture. They hid themselves in a cave. The enemies, accompanied by their guide, pur-

sued and almost overtook them. They followed the Holy Prophet's footprints, and got as far as the mouth of the Cave Saur, where he was hiding. Let us leave aside the particulars as to how the Holy Prophet escaped from the clutches of these murderous enemies and how his enemies returned disappointed after actually reaching the entrance of the cave. When the enemies reached near the cave Abu Bakr said :—" How are we to get out of this danger? We are only two, while the enemies are many in number?" And apparently there was no way of escape. But the reply, which came from the Holy Prophet at this fearful moment, shows that his heart was never to give way to fear even in face of direct danger. With perfect composure, he answered; "Grieve not, surely Allah is with us: And Allah is Mighty, Wise." The blessing of such composure is a matter for profound thought. It can not be exchanged for all the treasures of the world, but it can never come to a man unless he be large-hearted. It is the same with his treatment of his enemies after their defeat at his hands,

especially on the occasion of his conquest of Makka, when he not only granted them a general amnesty, but also honoured them with various favours. Among those towards whom such benevolence was extended was Amir Mu'awiyah—the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty, which established the first powerful Islamic Empire in the world,—the son of Abu Sufian, the man who was the Prophet's deadliest foe. Indeed, any enemy that came to meet the Holy Prophet was forgiven. But this generosity of mind, one should not forget, was the outcome of that largeness of heart which is the subject of this discussion. This fact, together with many other incidents in his life, prove, beyond the least shadow of doubt, that his resignation to God had reached a wonderful pitch. But I shall repeat again that this blessing of resignation comes only to the lot of one whose heart is large enough. This quality, however, pertains to every serious aspect of our life. If we consider our every-day existence, and think over those difficulties which beset us in our ordinary capacities as father, son, hus-

band, neighbour or citizen, we find them, at times, growing painful in themselves, and those alone can escape the resulting miseries who possess the requisite largeness of heart, because this wealth enables them to act in such a manner as would remove any amount of difficulties from their way, and at the same time win the heart of the deadliest foes so as to turn them into friends. Says the Holy Qur-an: Repel evil with what is best, when lo ! he between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.[1]

It was in this way that hundreds of the Holy Prophet's enemies, at one time thirsting for his blood, became later on his devoted and obedient followers. Umar the Great forms by himself a shining example of this transformation. A second is provided in the case of Khalid. In brief, a large-hearted man is not only saved from the constant complaints of his own kith and kin, but even draws his meed of praise from others. As against this, a man who treats his own family meanly and

1. 41 : 34.

without generosity, cannot be loved by his own children, to say nothing of other men. On the other hand, a liberal-minded man because he is not afraid of sacrifices for the sake of others, is invariably loved by all. But such a glory can be achieved only by him who has largeness of heart. Sacrifice is a thing that certainly puts a strain on the mind, but once the outlook has been widened through largeness of heart, even sacrifice becomes a source of comfort and happiness to him by whom the sacrifice is made.

Let me turn again to the verses with which I started. The Holy Qur-an, in its inimitable way, throws light on this subject by directing our attention to that which is at the root, so to speak, of all our troubles. If we can acquire control over that source and become immune from its evil workings, then we would have solved this seemingly insoluble problem. Says the Holy Qur-an: "Then surely with difficulty is ease." In our experience we find that every man is desirous, by nature, of happiness and comfort, but he will do well to remember that, as with light

and shade, ease and difficulty will be simultaneously confronting him at every step of his life's journey. We ought not to think that it pleases God to involve us in trouble. This, indeed, is a point which may well invite a deep philosophical discussion; but suffice it to say that the essential part in a man's character is patience with perseverance, and these are the treasures that make their possessor richer than if he were the undisputed king of the whole world. There is no work in the world which cannot be done with success by acquiring these two qualities. However much a man may boast of his strength of mind, patience and perseverance can never be found in him if he has not faced difficulties. God, the Merciful, has exposed this reality in the following words:

And He will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits, and give good news to the patient,

Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return."

These are they on whom are blessings and mercy from the Lord, and these are followers of the right course.[1]

In these verses the word which stands for the phrase "We shall most certainly try you" is a derivative of *Bala*, which means, among other things, to purify gold from dross by casting it into the fire; the idea being that God removes from our minds the weaknesses of impatience and lack of courage by calling into existence these trials for our benefit, and so makes us possessors of the blessing of perseverance. Thus He says that those who show their perseverance under such trials, become deserving of mercy and reward from their Lord, and are, moreover, guided in the right path. And just a little serious investigation will reveal that there can be no greater blessings than those mentioned above.

All praise be to God for having blessed His creatures with His gifts and for having shown them the correct way of enjoying them out of His Divine

1. 2:155—157.

Mercy, through the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Glory be to Muhammad for having set the noblest example! Blessed be the person who submits himself to the Divine Will and passes away from his worldly sojourn with happiness attendant upon him having served his Creator and His creatures to the best of his ability![1]

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[1] This last sentence is also the last thing the author wrote in this life. It was written a little while before he breathed his last—*Publishers.*

A FEW SALIENT FEATURES OF THE RELIGION OF ISLAM WHICH ARE NOT GENERALLY KNOWN

(*a*) It is absolutely monotheistic—no division in the Godhead—prayers are addressed directly to the Invisible God. Muhammad is as much a Prophet of God as Jesus, Moses, etc., upon whom all be the blessings of God, but like all other prophets before him, he is every bit a human being. Islam has neither ritual nor priesthood.

(*b*) It abhors warfare except in extreme cases of self-defence.

(*c*) The position it has given to woman is still unapproached by the laws of the most progressive nations of the modern world. According to Islam, there is no difference between man and woman—materially, spiritually, morally.

(*d*) It is the only religious outlook on life which can grapple with the disruptive forces at work in the world to-day.

(*e*) It is a widely admitted and an unparalleled achievement of Islam, that it has created a world-wide brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.

(*f*) Islam alone has succeeded in abolishing all unconscionable barriers of distinction, nationality, colour and language.

ATTITUDE OF ISLAM TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

"Every nation had an apostle" (The Qu'ran, ch. 10, v. 47). No religion other than Islam recognizes this truth.

SOME POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

It is wrong to think:
that Islam was spread by the sword;
that Islam is synonymous with polygamy;
that, according to Islam, woman has no soul;
and that the Islamic conception of Paradise is sensual.

THE CREED OF ISLAM

There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His apostle.

The Mosque, Oriental Road, Woking, Surrey

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1. Stands for the religion of Islam, popularly misnamed Mohammedanism (Islam, an Arabic word, literally means " peace "), the religion of all the prophets and founders, the last of whom was the Holy Prophet Muhammad, a Prophet very much misunderstood in the West on account of prejudices dating from the time of the Crusades.
2. Welcomes friendly discussions on religious subjects, either by interview or correspondence.
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